

Teacher's Prayer

please, god. let the hot water
in the trailer turn on, suddenly,
like a river flooding a bank.
let the nirvana hoodie
that reeks of cat piss
be washed with fresh detergent.

let these kids know some kindness.
let these kids know someone holding
a laundry basket to their hips as they walk
to the washer. let these kids have coats to shield
them from the harsh wind. let these kids have pepperoni
pizza birthday parties and let these kids know the touch of someone
who loves them.

let these kids memorize the wrinkles in someone's face, really
remember how they talked,
how they shuffled a deck of cards,
what they said
when they stubbed a toe.
let these kids have
someone they remember,
someone they could write a poem about,
someone who loves them enough to
put them first.
please let the kids have someone
who doesn't give a fuck if they get
a B minus on an essay if it keeps them alive.
please let these kids have someone who doesn't
call them a "pussy," someone who lets them have green hair,
someone who keeps them like a child should be kept safely, like
a flame clutched in a palm, not a match struggling to stay lit on
a cold night.

please let these kids please let these kids please let these kids

Dead Best Friend

Dead best friend, I
know dreams are your
house parties.

I am
like a teenager stealing
mom's vodka, getting
wasted for the first time.

You walk without striding, you
leap from dream to dream
and shadow to shadow.

I follow, but I haven't quite
learned to walk without legs,
how to live in the abstraction.

"Try to keep up," you say
as you drag me into your
old kitchen.

Everything
is how I remember. Captain Crunch
on the counter.
You open the fridge
And grab a cold piece of pizza.
Your dog
leaps up on my leg and I scratch him
between the ears.

Your dog is dead too.

"Let's make a deal," you say,
turning to me. "I'll teach you
how to walk through a dream,

if you let me remember what it is
like to walk barefoot in the sand.

I will teach you how to breath
without breath if you let me take
a deep draw of air.”

I’m about to answer, I’m
about to say

I will, I’d do
anything to trade places
to have you here
sipping coffee

and i wake up
to a siren wailing
outside

when i turn thirty

don't let it happen. don't become worse.
wait.
revise. edit the statement.

let it happen. become worse.

easy. i can do that.

maybe
this is razing something to build it back up. maybe
this is burning the manuscript
to write the novel.

a mantra for each day;

Monday: there is no magic and everyone must die,
Tuesday; eventually the furnace sputters and the house gets cold.
Wednesday; i can't keep waiting for the holes in the drywall to fill,
or for the mold on the baseboards to be scrubbed clean.
Thursday: i have to do it myself.
Friday: all my problems stem from the way i think;
Saturday: get a therapist.
Sunday: therapy is bullshit.

why do i think i'm different? Why do i think my
narrative arch is more gilded than
everyone else's?

what is latent, gradual, building,
like a hot wind sweeping across the grass?
what fires will catch?
what will fizzle out into ash?

why is there a
stranger in my bathroom?
why is he clutching his chest like
he's having a heart attack?

look , man, i tell myself, if you're not
going to kill yourself, you have to
do something. you can't just wait around
for another ten years. you can't just take a nap
in a car that's plunging down,
you have to break the window
and swim out.

why not, i answer? why not sleep if i am tired? why
not shatter if i am broken? why hold myself up for
another decade?

because, my friend, this is the door and
you have the key in your hands. because this is the
window and you have the brick. just because
time is a puncture wound letting your blood, just
Because your bones are glued to the floor, just because
you left your mind out in the cold and you dog chained your
soul and you are empty, you still have the key and
there is still

a way out.
so what if it's worse.

when i turn thirty
I am going
To find
A way out

Self Confidence

I'm a missed car payment and a towtruck idling in front of the house.

I'm three paces past the no trespassing sign.

I'm a cold winter solstice and a sputtering furnace.

I'm a patch of black ice and an overcorrection.

Litany

the only thing god told you when you were born
was

"keep it safe"

as he passed you

a small, open flame

Untitled

It's getting late. Always getting late.
A few moments past
dusk. No one really knows the minute,
the tiny flicker of
time that circles in the air,
lazy, like a leaf blown from a tree.

No one knows the hour. No calendars. It's always
one day past the bold red date on the disconnection notice,
one minute past closing.

I always run up
just as the workers lock the doors.
I'm the douchebag who
pulls out of the line at drive throughs
when it takes too long to order.
If anyone asks the time,
I shouldn't even pull out my phone.
I should just say

"You're late. I'm late. I'm always sleeping when
I should be singing and I don't
have a pulse on the days.

They just swim through my hand like minnows darting
through clear water. I'm hobbling through these nights.
In the morning,
I'm a half dead emptied vessel. A leaky battery.
I'm half awake in a Subway line
or a Burger King drive through. I'm half awake at a
funeral.

It's like when you drive somewhere new at night,
and the next day, in the light,
you take the same road, the same route.

Nothing is the same. It seems like the streets
have swapped names, the potholes shifted like
tectonic plates.

Nothing has changed, but nothing
is the same. It's like that with the days,
see. Each day is technically different, but they seem static,
dead, floating in the water, pale, drained of color
like a belly up fish.

I know I'm late, but these nights are
breathless and these days slide by and
I wish I could stop. I wish I could start.

I wish I could wake up.

I wish I could pull over,
But I have to keep driving.”

It's like

driving through a strip mall that stretches all the way to the county line.
It's like crossing the county line and driving through another strip mall.

It's like getting sideswiped in a Lowe's parking lot.

It's like getting sideswiped in a Costco parking lot.

It's like getting sideswiped in a Taco Bell parking lot.

It's like being blinded by the blaring light of the sunset,
scrambling to lower your visor, and rear ending a box truck.

It's like ripping your pants in half on the way to work--

no, not that, a little bit worse. It's like putting your dog to sleep--wait, no, that's too much.

It's like slipping on the ice and landing on your bad knee--getting closer, but it's not literary enough. It's like the well, and you keep free-falling, but Lassie was euthanized five years ago but you still find her fur on your old coats and you haven't willed yourself to bring her bag of stuffies and toys to Goodwill and they are all stuffed in a tote bag.

fuck, that's the worst one yet.

Remain

The only correction
for a 350 pound man,
alone,
in a car,
screaming
as he clutches
the steering wheel,
ready to be thrown
headlong into oblivion
like a sack of potatoes

is the hospital.

A ward.
Three days of
comatose,
no slipping, green socks.

And after?
The work.

Here is the narrative.

I am handing myself over to the ruthless nights
and the days full up with panic.
If I can ride above the current of lifting air
like a starling,
I will.

If I must feed on the dregs
like a suckerfish,
I will.

My only option is to remain.
The mantra.
REMAIN.

There is no gilded throne, no exit ticket.
There is no shortcut.

There is only tearing
into the meat of life like an animal,
crazed with wild thoughts
carried off by gusts,
spat out by the weak,
coughing ego,
hacking with sickness,
the self that is so frail
and so intent on breaking.

“Imagine,” I say to myself,
“a long gaze outwards,
at these mountains
And winds and woods.

Imagine a look out
towards the people who,
With frailness and kindness,
save others from
collapsing while they,
themselves, tremble.

Imagine something simple,
something pure.

But the most complicated trick the self can pull,
Like a tiger jumping through a burning hoop,
is to acknowledge that these two truths can exist at once.

The first: the self can be crumbling.
Maybe it should die. Not the body, not the spirit, but the self.
The thing that looks like a stranger. Maybe I should raze and
Build again.

The second: there is a world, and it is dying.

It is beautiful. It means everything.

There is a door you closed, and you can rise up from your sickbed and
Creak it open. You can cover your eyes from the harsh sunlight,
Take trembling first steps. You can rise. You can rise. You can rise.

You can remain.

Regression

I'm going to be the only guy
to ever hang himself
over spilled milk.

The Mythology of Conception

My mother and father, in a car, screaming towards midnight.

Each moment is a trapped ecosystem, like pond water in a jar. The conversation is like bacteria eating away at the host. Father is the host and mother isn't really listening. Mother is the host and father's mouth is open, drooling.

It is time to cross county lines and he finally stops pretending. He doesn't touch the brakes.

He says, "we're both miserable. Why not pull over, illuminate a mound of dirt with the headlights, break off a rib, and bury it."

"No," mother says. "You don't know the first thing about raising a child. Do you know how to fasten a seatbelt? How to warm a bottle? How to drip the milk on your wrist to check the heat? Do you even know how to keep a child alive?"

"I can't even keep myself alive," father says.

Mother sneers.

"That's your problem. You're too sad. You live inside of your sadness, burrow a home in it. Why are you sad? A God shouldn't be sad. A God should be violent or jealous or hopeful or full of pride. You never studied the Greeks."

“I was too busy playing Xbox and smoking weed out of an apple,” father says. “But if we did it and the rib really sprouted a tree and the fruit became a child, the child would be as miserable as the parent. It would not be right to bring up a child of God like that. It wouldn't be right for me to be a father. Think about where I come from.”

“Where do you come from?” mother asks.

“I come from a patch of black ice and an over correction. I come from a strip mall parking lot that stretches back into the horizon like a mountain range. Sure, I don't know much about the Greeks, but I heard about Odysseus. If we turned around and we beat the jaws of midnight I would have a Lowe's parking lot for a homecoming.”

“You think I want to stay in this car for eternity?” Mother says, gesturing to the interior of the Surbaru, the darkness lit up by the blue light of the dash. “Do you even think of me?”

Father drools a bit, glances lopsided at her. Not answering.

“When we were together in our bed, how could I know I'd be bound to you forever? This isn't about me. It's your dream. But if you tried, you could turn this car around, drive back, and go home,” she says.

Father doesn't answer. He doesn't even try.

“We don't get to choose our homeland,” she spits.

“But I choose not to go back. We should keep driving. I won't try to create a child from my flesh.”

“Our flesh,” mother says, correcting him.

He speaks as if he is the one who will bear the child, she thinks. And when he wakes up, we will crack our ribs in half like a bar of chocolate and bury a child deep in the earth.

I can't let him wake up.

My mother and father, in a car, screaming towards midnight, blood splattered on the dashboard.

Cat

A sleeping cat, twitching, her whiskers
Subtly dancing to some dream that sparks her
Senses and instincts.

At night, a small, soft paw crosses
My huge, heaping body. She takes the pilgrimage each night,
Traversing my mountainous frame rocked with the
Reverberations of snores.

At 5:30 in the morning,
I wake, on my side, to her profile, looking out the cracked
Open window, sniffing fresh air, staring
at birds, lit up golden light of the morning.

She does not know that yesterday, I was
On a high precipice, dreaming of freefalling into oblivion.
Or maybe she does, and that is why she turns her head,
Locks eyes with me, and purrs.

She says;

Yes, there is darkness. But you must
accept the darkness as a friend, as I do. You must
usher in the tired night with
open arms and use the
natural barrier of evening
as survival.

Go where where the dark is endless, full of stars,
A spattering of light in the void,
and claim some light as your own.
Claim a patch of sunlight. Remain,
My giant friend. There is so much that is delicious in the night.
So much warmth in the days. Stay a little while longer.

I think I can remain. For her.

The Editor

Submission guidelines.

Tell me gently, or don't tell me at all. I only want the soft secrets, the little whispers at brunch, the one soft hand over the mouth gasp. I'm so tired of the soul destroying revelations, the mad bursts of truth that rip through lives like a storm and leave us gasping, belly up, like dead fish. I'm no longer accepting submissions of bodies rotting under the floorboards, or lies kept in the attic, yellowed, wrapped in twine, like an old stack of magazines. I don't want to read about your dead fucking dog. I do not want to read fire hazards or expired foods. I am only reading warm and bright bedrooms and fresh linens.

I half mast my laptop and stir a stiff drink. When I am drunk, I smash coffee cups and plates against the wall and I light cigarettes in the kitchen, without cracking a window, scent lingering on the walls like a whispered memory. When I am sober, I hang my head like a dog as I spray the walls to clear the lingering smell. I dutifully push the shards into a dustpan with a broom.

When I am drunk, my life is splayed open out on the autopsy table, all victims of my ruin known, all pages open, hunched over a manuscript, pen scraping with blood. When I am sober I burn the manuscripts for warmth. When I am living, life is a dream, and when I am sleeping, I dream of my childhood bedroom, and wish I could return.

There are no simultaneous submissions. Each timeline is independent and runs parallel, like subway lines. Mistakes scurry across the tracks like rats, and moments crowd and push onto the overflowing cars.

I am drunk. I am going to drink more.

Send me your best work.

Stranger Approaching You in a Bar

Wait a minute, I know you. Do you remember me? We were playing up on the railroad trestle, high up over the river, when my brother stepped on a paper wasp nest. A big one. I remember looking at them, crawling all over, all over his bare chest and arms and legs, wriggling around, humming like they were electric, like they were waiting for something, some sign to start stinging.

We took to running. Wasps took to stinging. Brother got stung. Bad. Coroner said he had 200 stings, swollen on his bruised, broken body. Imagine that. 200 welts, still red and pussy when they laid him out on the metal table.

Oh yeah. Forgot. You didn't see him die. Guess it hurt so bad he flung himself off the bridge into the river. Heard him scream all the way down. I got stung a couple times. I don't think you did, did ya? You got lucky. Jesus, we must have been ten years old.

Do you remember? When he was standing there, with the wasps, how the crows kept circling? Je-sus, it's like they knew. He was crying, kept begging us to get the wasps off of him, but there wasn't nothing we could do, right? Once the wasps got to stinging, it could have been us, right? When they found him, downriver ways, his waterlogged skin was blue and bloat-ed and puffed and his eyes were swollen shut. We couldn't have helped him none, right? Wow. What a trip running into you here, man. How you been, by the way?

Secret

911 what's the address of the emergency? *If
I tell you, can you keep it secret?*

Sir, if I'm going to help you,
I need to know where you are.

*If I tell you
where I am, will the paper moon still hover,
barely above my head,
suspended by fishing line?*

Sir, what is the address?
*If I tell you, will you cut
the string?
Will you rip the moon down from the ceiling?*

Sir, this is is a line for
emergencies. Do you have an emergency?
*Yes. I don't want anything to change.
I made the moon and I strung it up myself.
It holds the night like a secret.*

Sir, I don't understand. *Neither do I.
It's a little bit like a knife
hidden in a sock.
It's a little bit like a diary with a lock.
It's a little bit like—*

Sir, if you don't have an emergency,
I'm going to have to disconnect the line.

*I do have an emergency. At least, I
might. Someday soon, when the moon
catches fire and ash floats down and
coats the floor.*

*When the fire catches to the
room. When the room goes up in flames.
When the house burns orange
in the forever moonless night.*

Trauma Research

the three stages
of vehicle submersion:

floating

sinking

submerged/BOTTOM. Most drownings occur

when the occupants wait
for the car to fill with
water before trying to swim out.

The way to survive the thing

is to escape while
the car still floats,
(you get anywhere between
five to sixty three
seconds before the
water reaches the bottom
of the side windows
and the car begins

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what matters most is

how

well you can break open
the window with the
metal hook of a seatbelt
while the car is still floating. How you
can keep the panic alive in your stomach,
harness it, and use it to
propel yourself through the crisis

and later, when you're warm and dry
you move against the incessant bucking
of your body (*you never left the car,*
You are FLOATING SINKING BOTTOM)
and climb in the driver's seat,

*it's like every time you breathe
the cold water is filling your lungs
and you should have died
and you should have died--*

and, no matter how bad you want to stop,
no matter how much you want to pull
over

you keep driving
you keep
bloodletting on the
steering wheel

I Don't Make Promises Anymore

the gulley on the side of the road
floods in the spring
and turns into a bog,
six feet deep in the middle
until it dries out in August.

there are tadpoles in the black stained water
and they are currency.
we put them in a 20 gallon plastic bin filled with
hose and rain water
and whichever grows
into the biggest frog wins.

we name them after pokemon
and we feed them earthworms
and we mess around with them,
make them wear hats and pretend t
hey are wizards before letting them
go in the retention pond.

usually, we stand on the rocks and try to catch them
but we can hear the frogs farther out in the little bog.

there's another rock that *maybe* we could jump to

and we could hop out into the middle of the gulley
and catch the big fat, almost frogs.

there's a barn in the cul-de-sac that's old and falling apart
and is gray and rotting,
and we're not allowed inside
but i go in all the time
because it's really neat.

there's dust and old bottles of whiskey
and metal and even old tractor pieces
and hoes and pitchforks on the wall.

I know there's an old ladder in there,
and if i stole it we could lay it across the rock
and reach the middle and
we could catch those really good tadpoles.

but we have to cross the rotting floor.
i'm scared. the floor is bouncy and watery
and when you put weight on it it kind of feels
like stepping on foam.

it's about ten feet to the side of the wall where the old ladder is
and i stand in the doorway
and i don't want to go first.

You say *i'll go first if you promise to save me if i fall.*

i say *ok*

and you take a step onto the rotted floor and it holds and i plod along behind you.

we get to the middle.

I am a few steps behind you.

your back foot falls through the floor.
you tumble backwards,
and bash your head off the floor
ragdolling backwards into the gaping hole.

i scream your name
your body hits and sounds like a dry sapling snapping
and you groan

and i hear your breathing
 get heavy and heavier and
 i hear you wretch
 and i can't move i have to save you i told you i would save you but if i move towards you
 i could fall into the middle and i'm frozen

and your heavy breathing sounds more like gasping, and i am laying on my stomach a
 few steps behind where the floor swallowed you.

and the gasping stops
 oh my god the gasping
 stops the gasping stops

and it's silent.

i'm not a serial killer, i promise but

when i was a kid i crushed bugs. our lawn had a hill and on the crest where the sun hit full on
 the grass at the end of the summer,

the grass it would be dry and would be hopping with tiny grasshoppers and aphids.

and i would sit and pick the grass in clumps and break the twigs up and make little log cabins,
 and every time i saw a little grasshopper

i'd play with it kind of like a cat does,

wait for it to hop almost out of reach and grab it gently between my fingers

but more often than not gentle wasn't gentle enough to keep their tiny bodies from popping and
 from keeping guts from smearing on my thumbs.

and i would imagine there were little villages and farms and
 as i stepped from grass clump to grass clump

i'd imagine stomping on all the little places and

i would picture smoke rising from the homes and the farms smushed and the little people screaming, "oh no! It's the giant!"

and they would be so afraid. they would all be afraid of me.
 on the bus steven punched me in the stomach
 because i wouldn't let him play my gameboy and
 i knew one day he would be afraid of me. in the lunch line
 kevin found a rotten tomato he forgot was in his backpack and
 put me in a headlock and smashed it in my face
 and oh won't he be sorry when i have him in a
 headlock and squeeze him a little too hard
 like he's a tiny grasshopper

. one day. kevin works at walmart and steven works at a car dealership and i will take them to
 the high dry grass and i will dry them out and i will i will will crush like bugs and i will i will

Approach

death.

Palm him a \$20,

whisper

"Me next.

Please. I'm all the way

spent. Got nothing left, spare a

finished epilogue

composed in my mind.

Please.

I want to be gone before the ink dries.

It's not so much I want to die,

It's that I'm not sure how to stay alive.

Not sure how to move through the days.

Not sure if I deserve to stay."

Death says,

"Look. I got a lot of open doors to close.

I got a lot of threads to cut.

I could spend all day reaping and

I could feast every night. But I look

forward to the mornings, when the orange sun is low

and new in the sky. I enjoy losing as much as I win.

I love life as much as I love

the absence of it.

I'll come when I am called.

There is no steamwhistle ringing out for you.

Don't ring the bell yourself.

Jesus, kid.

It's not about

what you deserve.

It's not about punishment.

Jesus.

Get a better fucking therapist."

and in my stomach i feel worms
where i should feel a pouch of berries.
and on my face i have etched violence
when i should have lathered with softness and bright.
and these legs give out,
and these eyes are blackened, pushed back into the sockets
where is the body?
what narrative does it pull from the ashes?
what stories do the limbs speak?
what sin does the spit spell?

No boundaries. The only geographic landmarks are trash bags split open on the shoulder of the two lane road, leaking garbage, fast food wrappers lifting, flying up from the force of passing cars. A Wendy's. A Lowe's. A Home Depot across the street, houses of orange perched, taking sentry at the house of blue.

Two home improvement stores alike in dignity.

I need to take a wicked shit.

I accelerate a little bit, and my 2002 Honda Civic sputters in protest. A Shell Station passes. Dairy Queen. More trash.

Stomach clenches and drops. It's bad. Really bad. I know it's going to take a few hours, years, minutes to pass through this strip mall and get home. I don't have that long. Frantic, reacting to the pressure and pushing at the bowels, nauseous, stomach sloshing and begging to exit. Coming up from a gentle sloping hill, like the horizon is giving birth. There it is. The combination KFC/Taco Bell. I have shit in that bathroom many times. Since childhood.

Friend, I think, as I put on my blinker and slow, about to turn into the parking lot. I have known you since I first supped the Baja Blast, first my teeth gently into the Crunchwrap Supreme. You have cradled me, kept me safe. And once again, I come home to you, begging for help. Begging for you to let me take a shit.

Clenching, I run inside the empty restaurant. I hurry, waddling, towards the bathroom. And I am home.

And I rush to the stall, and as soon as I pull down my pants and sit on the cold toilet seat, it sounds like a can of salsa is dumped into the toilet, and I am staring down at the tile watching the patterns dance and counting them and checking Reddit and I am on the toilet in the strip mall and outside there is trash blowing like a sandstorm and I am on the toilet and my stomach is clenching and unclenching, and I am fantasizing about a Burrito Grande while loose, diarrheal shit flows out of my ass and the hot, heavy heat pounds against the black tar of the expanse of parking lot that stretches forever.

A CATALOG OF ALL THE SHIT THOUGHTS THAT RUN THROUGH MY BRAIN ON A REGULAR FUCKING BASIS PART ONE

what if my dog knows i'm a bad person
 what if my dog hates me because i don't let her lick my face when i come down the stairs in the morning
 why do i freak out in my car all the time
 why does getting cut off in traffic make me scream like a child
 wow i'm really fucked up aren't i
 why do i scream like a child
 my knees hurt all the time i'm going to die soon
 i have weird pains in my side i think i'm going to die soon
 i think i'm going to die soon
 i think i'm going to die soon
 i hope i die soon
 why do i keep having nightmares about my childhood dog did he hate me
 what if my dad wants to punch me in the face
 why would your dad want to punch you in the face
 (cus you're a bad person)
 why do two voices speak in my head
 why do i refer to myself in my thoughts as "you" and not "me" like there's two of us?
 all that binge drinking is going to kill you don't go to the doctors just let it happen
 6 cups of coffee later and i'm having an anxiety attack why do i drink this much coffee jesus
 christ even the shit that destroys me is so mediocre
 what if i ruin everything
 i'm going to ruin everything
 i'm going to ruin everything
 why does nobody listen to anything i say
 everything is going to come down soon
 why am i spending so much money
 why am i such a sack of shit
 you're going to feel the way you felt on your worst day again the day he died it's going to happen again with your mom and dad and maybe god fucking forbid your sister and your girlfriend and fucking everyone
 it's 1:11 PM and i'm still in my pajamas why am i even alive
 have i ever done anything bad (yes) what (all things)
 all my friends know there's something wrong with me
 are cops watching me (yes) wait really (no you crazy fuck)
 do you belong here (no) where do you belong (nowhere)
 you bought a pack of cigarettes if your girlfriend finds out she's going to be pissed but she won't find out because you're hiding it what else do you hide why do you hide why are you so ashamed about everything you do always
 you will pay for the things you do
 you will pay for the things you do

you will pay for the things you do
you will pay for the things you do

in school suspension

Next door, a *pop*. *Is this it?* No, it's science class, and they're learning about helium. Mr. Simon accidentally over inflated a balloon.

In the hallway, the sound of a kid dropping her history book on the floor. The sound echoes down the hallway. I snap my head towards the sound. *Is this it?*

No. It's just Mya Knowles, who has a backpack that weighs more than she does and bulges out like a hunchback, who always has more books in her hands than she can carry. I ask her if she needs some help.

In the lunchroom, over the din of eighth graders squealing and playing Youtube videos of cats eating pizza, some kids in the hallway are screaming, and it doesn't sound like normal yelling. *Is this it?* No, just a pack of friends seeing who can yell "Fortnight Ballsacks" the loudest.

Before I was a teacher's aid, I worked as a 911 dispatcher, and we had to attend a conference about "mass casualty incidents", like mass shootings. We listened to 911 calls from Las Vegas. And the presenter said, "it's not *if* a mass casualty incident will happen. It's a matter of when."

The looming doom that hangs like a bloated thundercloud over Mrs. Berry's seventh grade social studies classroom as they learn about the Second Amendment.

Please God, not today. Please God, not here. Please God, don't let this hang over the one safe place some of these kids have. Please don't dangle the terrible option in front of these kids who are already living in trailers or campers with tarps for roofs and no running water.

The expectation is that you enter the classroom quietly, I say to a chatting group as they push into math class. One day, they may reply

and I expect not to be shot.

What if? The question that is suspended over us all as we try to keep these kids from the snarling, poisoned fangs, the implications of that question.

The terror of the *not if, but when*.

Suicide and the Burning Hill

It has been so cold,
and I have felt it all.
My fingers have been whipped
by rain, and the dull,
deep ache of winter
has settled
way inside.
Whatever self is left rises,
steaming, vapor,
and escapes through my dumb,
open lips.

I should have read the warnings.
I am building towards
destruction-
never sudden like a heart attack
or a car accident.

Always something gradual, building,
a foehn wind, a basket
of dry flames, ominous, large, looming, silent.
Then the spark. Then the flame..

We were together, on the hill, overlooking the great
Monolith when the hot winds
finally caught the landscape in a flash of
burning.

But only I could
feel the waves of release. You were drooling, confused,
and riddled with psychosis. I picked you up
as singed ash fluttered down, carried by the winds,
and helped you to the car. We drove
into the flaming monolith
and you howled for Moloch
The whole way home.

The Mythology of Conception

My mother and father, in a car, screaming towards midnight.

Each moment is a trapped ecosystem, like pond water in a jar. The conversation is like bacteria eating away at the host. Father is the host and mother isn't really listening. Mother is the host and father's mouth is open, drooling.

It is time to cross county lines and he finally stops pretending. He doesn't touch the brakes.

He says, "we're both miserable. Why not pull over, illuminate a mound of dirt with the headlights, break off a rib, and bury it."

"No," mother says. "You don't know the first thing about raising a child. Do you know how to fasten a seatbelt? How to warm a bottle? How to drip the milk on your wrist to check the heat? Do you even know how to keep a child alive?"

"I can't even keep myself alive," father says.

Mother sneers.

“That’s your problem. You’re too sad. You live inside of your sadness, burrow a home in it. Why are you sad? A God shouldn’t be sad. A God should be violent or jealous or hopeful or full of pride. You never studied the Greeks.”

“I was too busy playing Xbox and smoking weed out of an apple,” father says. “But if we did it and the rib really sprouted a tree and the fruit became a child, the child would be as miserable as the parent. It would not be right to bring up a child of God like that. It wouldn’t be right for me to be a father. Think about where I come from.”

“Where do you come from?” mother asks.

“I come from a patch of black ice and an over correction. I come from a strip mall parking lot that stretches back into the horizon like a mountain range. Sure, I don’t know much about the Greeks, but I heard about Odysseus. If we turned around and we beat the jaws of midnight I would have a Lowe’s parking lot for a homecoming.”

“You think I want to stay in this car for eternity?” Mother says, gesturing to the interior of the Surbaru, the darkness lit up by the blue light of the dash. “Do you even think of me?”

Father drools a bit, glances lopsided at her. Not answering.

“When we were together in our bed, how could I know I’d be bound to you forever? This isn’t about me. It’s your dream. But if you tried, you could turn this car around, drive back, and go home,” she says.

Father doesn’t answer. He doesn’t even try.

“We don’t get to choose our homeland,” she spits.

“But I choose not to go back. We should keep driving. I won’t try to create a child from my flesh.”

“Our flesh,” mother says, correcting him.

He speaks as if he is the one who will bear the child, she thinks. And when he wakes up, we will crack our ribs in half like a bar of chocolate and bury a child deep in the earth.

I can’t let him wake up.

My mother and father, in a car, screaming towards midnight, blood splattered on the dashboard.

